

Excerpt from Chapter 4 of *Julia Unleashed*

By Laura Preslan

"What'd you think of the meeting yesterday?" Dave asked from the doorway of Julia's office.

"Overall, it was good," she fibbed. "I'm bummed that we didn't push harder on improvements and that I didn't get more support for my team's ideas and policy changes. Want to have a seat?" Julia gestured toward her couch. A break with Dave would be good.

"No thanks, this is just a drive by." Dave shifted uncomfortably. "You were pretty tough on Jeff."

Julia was incredulous. "Tough? How? I was just outlining an issue and recommending a course of action. I was helping by showing everyone the data." *Bland face, bland face*, she told herself to combat the heat creeping up her neck.

"You definitely did that, but you also said Jeff is a bad corporate citizen." Dave walked to

the window to check out her view of Mount Baker before the early afternoon sunset hid the mountain.

"No I didn't – I just explained how we could plug a gap. I brought cold hard facts to the table to drive change." Julia rubbed her eyes under her glasses, glad she hadn't bothered with make-up that morning – nothing to smear.

"Maybe that was what you *intended* to do." Dave turned back toward her, his face sympathetic. "But it certainly came across like you were attacking him, even though you did it in a nice, respectful tone. Given our current financial results, that was a pretty brutal."

"Brutal? How is it my fault that the data made Jeff look bad? The facts are the facts. If that made him look bad, that's his problem. I'm just doing my job."

"Now Julia, did it feel good to show all that data and be prepared to answer the questions?" Dave gave her a questioning look.

"Of course it did." Being good at math was core to her job.

"Have you thought about the impact on Jeff's ego? The team gave you about twenty hints you were pushing too hard, but you just kept nailing him."

"I wasn't nailing him. I was pointing out the facts and answering questions." Julia couldn't believe that's how Dave saw it.

"That may be, but you locked him in a four-sided box. The only way out was to admit that he and his team were making bad decisions and being irresponsible with the company's money. Look at it from his point of view."

"That is totally unfair. Why would people side with him instead of the data?"

"Julia, be reasonable. You didn't have to throw his bad behavior in everyone's face and be such a jerk about it."

Julia took a breath to collect her thoughts so she didn't overreact to being asked to *be reasonable*. She had done her job. She was protecting shareholder value. Jeff's team was acting poorly and had gotten away with it for far too long. Everyone talked about it behind closed doors. She was the only one who had the courage to take him on.

She swallowed her anger, again. Dave mistook her silence as an opportunity to continue. "Face it, Jules. You showed up for a battle with a cannon and all Jeff had to defend himself was a pocketknife. You scared the shit out of him."

This again, Julia thought. *Oh Julia, you're so scary. Men with delicate egos don't like you because you point out their bad behavior.* "I get it. I shouldn't be scary, but he's tanking the business. Why does that make it okay for his team to give away millions of dollars of discounts without consequences?"

"It doesn't, but you've created a real problem now."

"No. He created the problem." Julia's tone was sharper than she intended. She dialed it back with a calming breath.

"I hear you, but you bruised his ego and now he's on a rampage. Sorry to be the one to tell you. He told Blane to fire you."

An icy fist closed around Julia's heart. *Could she actually get fired over this?* "Fire me? For doing my job? Come on!"

The stress of preparing for the meeting and then having it all blow up consumed her. Julia's shoulders dropped as her breath whooshed out of her lungs. She hung her head in defeat.

Dave gave her a look filled with sympathy. "I don't know how you can get out of this one, Julia. Maybe it's time to look for a new job."

"Leave? Me? I just got my team in good enough shape for us to start doing the work we need to be doing. I can't give up now." *Especially just because some moron has an ego problem.* "I need to figure out a plan." She knew that at the end of the day, she was right.

See what happens next!

[Julia Unleashed \(The Steak and Bourbon Series Book 1\)](#)